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Report of the Committee on Jewish Studies

2 April 2002

Professor Robert Schine
Dean of the Faculty
Old Chapel

Dear Dean Schine:

We are pleased to present this report in response to your invitation to consider the state of Jewish Studies at Middlebury College. We are grateful to you for allowing us to serve the College in this way. During the course of our deliberations, we became all the more convinced of the importance of Jewish Studies in the curriculum of a nationally ranked College like Middlebury. Some aspects of the field lie at the very foundations of Western history and culture. Others reflect dark elements at the core of Western history and culture. Jewish Studies belongs in our curriculum, therefore, because of its own intrinsic worth and because it teaches us so much about our history and ourselves.

In writing of the importance of Jewish Studies in our curriculum, we emphasize as strongly as we can our conviction that Jewish Studies is not for Jewish students only. It serves the interests of all students. Indeed, every course we currently teach that counts towards a minor in Jewish Studies draws students from throughout the student body. In writing this report, therefore, we are not concerned with a constituency but with the entire College.

We divide our report into two parts. The first treats our understanding of the areas of study and the disciplines that belong to Jewish Studies. It also lists courses currently offered at Middlebury falling into these categories. The second makes specific recommendations for adequately covering these areas and disciplines. Our goal is the establishment of a core faculty in Jewish Studies that will develop a core curriculum and teach it on a regular basis. We hope that in time other faculty will offer courses that address issues related to Jewish Studies. But without commitment to a core faculty and core curriculum, the study of Jewish history, religion, culture, language, and literature will remain an unfulfilled promise at Middlebury.

Description

The curriculum in Jewish Studies at Middlebury College should include courses in the following three areas: (I) History and Politics; (II) Religion, Culture, and Literature; and (III) language. Although the three areas will frequently overlap, and although faculty teaching in one area will frequently teach courses in one or more of the other areas, they are distinct enough to warrant treatment separately. We begin, therefore, by describing courses that belong in each area.

I. Courses on the history of Judaism should cover (1) the early Israelite period up to the building of the second temple, the second temple period, and the rise of rabbinic Judaism; (2) the Middle Ages and Renaissance; (3) the European Diaspora; (4) the Holocaust; (5) the formation of the modern state of Israel; and (6) Jews and Judaism in America.

Some of these courses would be broad surveys; others would be more focused, perhaps the topics of seminars. Some would also work best as comparative courses. And though all could be approached using the disciplines of history, the disciplines of political science would be equally appropriate for some periods.

Currently, the Middlebury Catalog lists five courses in Israelite and early Jewish history: RE 280, 288, 380, 260, and 361. Only one of these, however, has been offered with any regularity—RE 280; RE 380 has been offered, on average, every four years. Within the past fifteen years we have offered only one course on a topic related to Judaism in the Middle Ages (RE 271, twice). Professor Lamberti has regularly taught a course on the History of Jews in Europe (HI 350) and seminars and Winter Term courses on the Holocaust. Occasionally we have drawn on the expertise of others in the community to fill-in some of the gaps in our curriculum. Dean David Edleson developed RE 288 and has offered it twice. Dr. Joshua Sherman, a local resident and independent scholar who has written on European Jewish issues and the British Mandate in Palestine, has twice offered a course on Jewish Nationalism (RE 269). Both of these courses remain in our catalog, though without guarantee of being offered again. We had one course on Jews in America during the Scott Winter Term cluster of courses in 1996.

II. The area of Religion, Culture, and Literature is diverse, as the terms suggest. Here we place an introductory course on Judaism analogous to the introductory courses on Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism. Such courses allow students to obtain a basic knowledge of a religion's history, literature, basic concepts, and practices. We also place in this category courses on Jewish philosophy and theology. In this category belong courses on the varieties of Judaism in the modern world or on the relationship between Judaism in America and Israel. With regard to Jewish literature, we have in mind primarily literature deriving from the Diaspora or in translation, reserving the question of literature in Hebrew to the next section. There is a place here for courses on the classics of Hebrew literature, on novels by Jewish writers that focus on issues related to Jewish life and thought (broadly construed).

Here too, some courses will be surveys, some seminars, and some comparative. Winter Term will also be an occasion for exploring topics that might not warrant a full semester.

In this area, we currently offer an introductory course titled The Jewish Tradition (RE 160). This course has been taught almost every year since 1986, though prior to 1996 is was called Jews and Judaism and carried the course number 201. Robert Schine offers a seminar on Jewish philosophy (360), which has been taught, on average, every other year since the early 90s. Although we are learning now of courses that include significant emphasis on Jewish authors (especially American Jewish authors), none of them have been listed among courses counted toward the Jewish minor and none explicitly refer to Jewish Studies or even identify the authors as Jewish (EL 414 and 211; AL 204. 240). Dean Edleson will be offering a new course in the Fall of 2003 on Modern Hebrew Literature in Translation. It will be cross-listed as RE/LI 266. Under the rubric of "culture," one might also include GG 220 and 414, though only the latter actually mentions "Israel" in its description.

III. Hebrew has a prominent place in Jewish Studies: Judaism's classic texts are in Hebrew and the return to Hebrew as a spoken language was a crucial element in the establishment of the modern state of Israel. It is important, however, to make a distinction between Hebrew in its classical and modern forms, for they are quite different and require different pedagogical techniques. Classical

Hebrew treats the Biblical texts and some rabbinic texts, though the latter take on additional grammatical and linguistic elements and can be read only at the upper levels of language study. To cover Classical Hebrew adequately requires at least four semesters; Modern Hebrew would require the same, if not more since it involves the spoken as well as the written word.

As with all language study, both Classical and Modern Hebrew are labor intensive. The courses must be small enough to allow for instruction and drills.

Currently Middlebury offers courses only in Classical Hebrew. All courses are listed and taught through the Classics Department. Six courses are listed, two covering Introduction and Intermediate Hebrew, two dealing with "Readings" in Biblical and Classical Hebrew, and two described as "Advanced Hebrew Studies." As with the other languages in the Classics Department, the introductory course is offered every other year. The "Advanced" courses are taught rarely.

For the past fifteen years, Robert Schine and his temporary replacements (either for leaves or administrative service) have taught most of the courses in Jewish Studies. Professor Lamberti has taught the course on the History of the Jews in Europe and seminars on the Holocaust. Professor Yarbrough has taught the Hebrew Bible course, seminars on topics in the Hebrew Bible, and seminars related to early Judaism. Professor Schine and his replacements have also taught the courses in Hebrew language in the Classics Department, though prior to his coming Professor Adler taught Biblical Hebrew.

Recommendations

We strongly recommend that Middlebury College enhance its commitment to the support and development of Jewish Studies in our curriculum. In the first instance, we recommend that a member of the faculty be assigned to coordinate Jewish studies over the next few years to work with departments and programs to identify courses that might be included in the list for the Jewish Studies program and to encourage some departments to add courses. The coordinator, in consultation with faculty already involved in Jewish Studies, should develop a set of criteria by which courses would be evaluated with a view to inclusion in the Jewish Studies curriculum. Among the departments which merit immediate attention are English, American Literature and Civilization, History, Political Science, and Geography. But we can also think of ways that, say, a member of the Russian Department might develop a course with significant attention to issues related to Jewish Studies. We also anticipate that should a program in Middle Eastern Studies be mounted courses cross-listed with Jewish Studies will be included. We note also in this context that when a more extended list of courses in Jewish Studies is developed, it will be necessary to reexamine the requirements for the Jewish Studies Minor.

As helpful as these efforts will be for the development of a curriculum in Jewish Studies, however, we are convinced additional faculty positions are needed to provide adequate coverage of the field. The members of the faculty who have taught courses related to Judaism have labored well. But they are simply too few to mount enough courses to cover the field adequately. Clearly, more staffing is needed.

The areas we believe to be essential for a program in Jewish Studies include:

Hebrew Bible
Second Temple and Early Judaism

Medieval Judaism
The European Diaspora
The Holocaust
Jews and Judaism in America

An introductory course on the Jewish Tradition
Major Jewish Movements and Thinkers
The Classics of Jewish Literature in Translation

Classical Hebrew

Since one full-time appointment and a few faculty members willing to teach occasional courses (whether regular or adjunct) cannot meet the curricular needs of the College in the area of Jewish Studies, we recommend the approval of two positions, one in Hebrew Bible/Early Judaism (linked to the teaching of Classical Hebrew) and one in the History of the Jews in the European Diaspora with a focus on Germany. Scholars appointed to these positions, together with Robert Schine, would form the core faculty in Jewish Studies and develop a core curriculum to meet our needs.

The former position would provide for the continuation of the Hebrew Bible course and for inclusion of courses on early Judaism on a regular basis. It would also allow for occasional seminars in these areas. Furthermore, it would allow more adequate coverage of courses in Classical Hebrew in the Classics Department. As a corollary, this position would make it possible for Professors Yarbrough and Schine (when he returns to teach fulltime) to offer additional courses—Yarbrough in New Testament and Early Christianity, Schine in Medieval and Modern Jewish thought. Finally, it would also allow the Religion Department to offer basic courses in Biblical Studies when Yarbrough is on leave or has reduced teaching loads because of committee assignments.

The latter position is in fact currently held by Professor Lamberti. The History Department has already submitted a proposal for a position covering the history of the Jews in the European Diaspora and the History of Germany. We support that proposal and recommend that the faculty member in this position teach at least two regular semester courses in Jewish history each year. The holder of this position would participate in the Jewish Studies Program. The definition of this history position carries the advantage of making this faculty appointment serve the needs of and contribute to the Jewish Studies Program as well as the International Studies Program and German Studies.

We know that further deliberations on these two positions will necessarily involve both the Educational Affairs Committee and the chairs of the three departments in which the positions would be placed—Religion, History, and Classics. The members of this committee would be pleased to discuss the positions with any of our colleagues, believing that both of the positions are key to the development of Jewish Studies at Middlebury.

Although we clearly rank the positions in Hebrew Bible/Early Judaism and European Jewish History highest among those discussed, we have considered others. We note, for example, that should a program in Middle Eastern Studies be created, it would require a position that included coverage of the history of the modern state of Israel. Similarly, a program in Middle Eastern Studies would eventually require the addition of Modern Hebrew, though we recognize that it might need to be phased in along with Arabic. We assume this will be a topic of discussion for the Middle Eastern Studies committee. Should Modern Hebrew be added to the curriculum, this might also provide the

opportunity to include courses in Modern Hebrew Literature. And as this program develops, it will be important to consider ways for our students to study in the region.

Finally, we recommend that when the core faculty is in place and a core curriculum in Jewish Studies is successfully running the College consider establishing Jewish Studies as a major. In due course, consideration should also be given to the possibility of granting Jewish Studies program status. Because the most important step is to establish a core faculty and curriculum, however, we recommend that these deliberations take place at a later time.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to take part in this evaluation of the Jewish Studies at Middlebury College. We are convinced Jewish Studies should have a place in the curriculum of any college of our standing. And we commend those who have labored long and hard to give it that place in our curriculum. But we believe it is time for Middlebury College to another step in the development of this field. And because this belief, we stand ready to discuss the report and the issues it raises with you and any others who might be making decisions based on it.

Sincerely,

Carol Bakhos

Walid Saleh

Jeff Cason

Marc Witkin

Marjorie Lamberti

Larry Yarbrough, Chair